

Contending for the Faith

A Study
on the Book of

JUDE

BJ Rudge, Ph.D.



Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version Bible, copyright © 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are from the New King James Version of the Bible, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contending for the Faith—A Study on the Book of Jude

Copyright © 2024 by BJ Rudge and Bill Rudge

ISBN 978-1-889809-27-4

Published by Living Truth Publishers

A Division of Bill Rudge Ministries, Inc.

Hermitage, Pennsylvania

www.billrudge.org

Typesetting by Pine Hill Graphics

Cover Design by Alpha Advertising

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the author or publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

[Avoiding Deception](#)

[Contend for the Faith](#)

[Dangers of False Teaching](#)

[Fruit of False Teaching](#)

[How Do We Persevere Amid False Teaching in the Church?](#)

[Keys to Biblical Discernment](#)

[Satan's Plan of Attack](#)

[Establish Safeguards](#)

[For More Information](#)

Avoiding Deception

After Jesus' scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13-36) and His lamenting over the coming judgment upon the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-38), we read the following:

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (Matthew 24:1-8).

As did Jesus' disciples (Matthew 24:3), we wonder ourselves when Jesus will return. Bombarded daily with headlines of wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes in various places, natural disasters and the spread of pestilences and diseases, the reality of His return seems closer today than ever before. As I am writing this, the news headlines echo Jesus' words in Matthew 24.

Let us not forget that the first sign Jesus told the disciples to be aware of is deception. Jesus even warns that false christs and false prophets will arise showing great signs and wonders to deceive the world. This deception will be so great that Jesus says, if possible, even true believers (the elect) will be deceived (Matthew 24:23-26). This theme of deception continues throughout the pages of the New Testament as the Apostles Paul and Peter confront the dangers of false teaching that had crept into the church (2 Corinthians 11:1-14; Galatians 1:6-10; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Peter 2).

To avoid the deception that comes through false teaching, Christians are given numerous commands: We are called to "test everything" (1 Thessalonians

5:21), “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us” (2 Thessalonians 2:15), “take care [be on your guard]” (2 Peter 3:17), “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12), “exhort and rebuke” (Titus 2:15) and “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). These commands, specifically the call to contend, capture the heart of this study which will take us into an in-depth look at the book of Jude—a book that was specifically written to equip believers to avoid the deception of false teaching and persevere in the truth of God’s Word.

In our study, we will examine the call to contend for the faith as we address the dangers of false teaching, the fruit of false teaching, the identification of false teachers, and the ways to persevere and stand firm in the midst of deception. The intention of this study is to go beyond giving just factual information about the book of Jude. It is designed to enable you to warn others while, at the same time, providing safeguards for your own life against false teaching. Although Jude is a short book with only one chapter, it is overflowing with crucial and relevant information for believers today.

My passion for this study comes from personal experience in how false teaching has affected people I greatly care about. One dear friend became a spiritual casualty of the false teaching that permeated the church he attended. That teaching led to the destruction of his faith and the spiritual devastation of his entire family. Another has been caught up in the pattern of spiritual addiction—devoid of discernment, her life is in a constant cycle of trying to find her next spiritual high. These two examples reflect the need for all of us to contend for the faith so that our loved ones and ourselves may avoid the traps of spiritual deception.

As with any book of the Bible, one’s study should begin by asking some background questions. Specifically, who, when, where and why will help to provide an appropriate historical context. According to most scholars, the book of Jude was written around 65 CE. Besides experiencing external pressure from the Roman empire, the church was dealing internally with the infiltration of false teaching. In response, Jude pens this epistle to an unknown group of believers urging them to contend for the faith against false teaching.

We know that Jude was the author of this book because he identifies himself in the very first verse, “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.” Since the Hebrew name Jude (Judas in the Greek) was a common name in Palestine, and we find several people with this name in the New Testament (Matthew 10:4; Luke 6:16; Acts 9:11, 15:22), there has been some speculation as to which Jude wrote this book. The consensus among scholars is that this is the half-brother of Jesus. Jude supports this view by referring to himself as the brother of James (Jude 1:1), who was not only the leader of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) but also a half-brother of Jesus.

There is great significance to Jude being the author of the epistle. When you look at his life, you find that he was initially an unbeliever and, along with other family members, thought his half-brother Jesus was out of His mind (Mark 3:20-21, 31). However, like his brother James who also initially rejected Jesus as

the Messiah (John 7:5), he encountered Jesus after His resurrection and became one of His followers (Acts 1:14). Actually, Jude identifies himself as a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for servant carries with it the idea of being devoted to another person with no regard for one's own interests. Thus, Jude is telling his readers that he lives his life not for himself but for Jesus Christ. As we will see later in this study, this is the exact opposite attitude of the false teachers.

In verse 3, Jude clearly lays out the purpose of his letter:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

While Jude initially wanted to write about the common salvation they shared, he explains that there was a compelling obligation that prompted him to change the focus of his letter for their spiritual benefit. Jude wants them to understand not just the importance but the urgency of what he had written them. My wife and I have six children. Sometimes it can be a challenge to get them all together as they are always heading in different directions. So, when my wife and I need to tell all of them something that is important, we have family meetings. The kids know right away that when I call a family meeting, they are to stop what they are doing and immediately go into the living room, sit down and be quiet because Mom and Dad are going to say something that is important for all of them to hear. This is exactly what Jude is doing in this opening verse. He was telling his readers it's time for a family meeting because what he needed to say was of the utmost importance.

In the next part of our study, we are going to specifically examine what Jude meant by "contending for the faith." A call that he not only gave to his readers but one that he lived out. A call that took an unbeliever to a martyr, where, according to tradition, he would die by being crucified and having arrows pierced into his body.

Contend for the Faith

In the previous chapter, we talked about the importance and urgency that prompted Jude to change his course of action in what he was going to write. While his initial plan was to write about their common salvation, he now “found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). What did Jude mean when he told his readers to “contend for the faith?” To make sense of this, we are going to focus upon the words *contend* and *faith*.

A Study On the Word: Contend

The word *contend* in the Greek literally means to “struggle,” “suffer,” “be under great stress” or “fight a fight.” It carries with it the imagery of the intense effort that goes into a wrestling match. Thus, we as Christians are to be just like wrestlers in the sense that we are to display an intense effort in standing for the truth. In junior high, I decided to go out for wrestling. My career as a wrestler did not last two weeks into the season; I broke my collarbone sledding. While these two weeks gave me a small window into the intensity that goes into wrestling, it in no way made me an expert in the sport. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of this image of a wrestler competing in a match, I decided to contact a friend of mine. My friend not only qualified for the State Tournament in high school, but he qualified for Nationals in college and has coached wrestling for many years. In response to my question about what it takes to be a good wrestler, he stated the following, “You need to be resilient, have tenacity, and a good work ethic focused on learning the proper way to train.” Thus, just like a wrestler, Jude is calling his readers to be resilient and have tenacity as they are engaged in a fight to contend for the faith. Especially, consider the following three keys about this call to “contend.”

1. Call to Action

We cannot just sit back as spectators. Instead, like a wrestler, we need to be actively engaged which will involve a level of confrontation. As John MacArthur correctly notes, “Here is a call to know sound doctrine, to be discerning in sorting out truth from error, and to be willing to confront and attack error.” This idea is certainly countercultural where we are told not to

judge others and get along (coexist). However, this battle of contending for the faith against false teaching has been going on throughout the history of the church. Starting with Stephen (Acts 6–7), who had to contend with the Jewish authorities, this fight for our faith will continue until Jesus Christ returns.

The Protestant Reformation is a great example of a time in Christian history when people lived out this call to contend for the faith. This movement, which was led by people like Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, John Huss, John Frith, Martin Luther and John Calvin, saw numerous men and women endure persecution and even death in their struggle to stand against false teaching and for the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Consider the life of Walter Milne, who after hearing the Gospel while traveling in Germany, gave his life to Jesus Christ. Upon returning to Scotland, this Scottish monk began to preach against non-biblical doctrines and abuses by the clergy that were going on at the time. His zeal in contending for the faith eventually led to his arrest, being put on trial and condemned to death at the age of 82 (April 20, 1558). His final words, before being burned at the stake, are a powerful testament to the important call for all believers to contend for the faith:

...the cause why I suffer this day is not for any crime laid to my charge (albeit I am a miserable sinner before God) but only for the defense of the faith of Jesus Christ, set forth in the Old and New Testament unto us.... I praise God that he hath called me of his mercy, among the rest of his servants, to seal up his truth with my life, which as I have received it of him, so willingly I offer it to his glory.

2. Call to a Spiritual Battle for Truth

As Christians, we are not in a physical battle but a spiritual battle against any belief, idea, worldview, etc. that comes against the truth of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:12). Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth speak directly to this reality, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

3. Call for ALL True Believers

My daughter signed up to receive a Christian magazine for teenage girls. Through this magazine, she was set up with a pen pal where they would correspond back and forth on various issues. During one of their correspondences, my daughter shared with me some of the beliefs taught by her pen pal's church. My daughter said that as soon as she read them, she knew they were not biblically right. Therefore, my daughter wanted me to provide her with some guidance on how to appropriately respond to her pen pal. In other words, my daughter, who was 14 years old at the time, wanted to contend for the faith

against false teaching. This situation with my daughter is a great reminder that contending for the faith is not just for pastors, elders and people with seminary degrees. It is for all true believers!

A Study On the Word: Faith

In the next part of our study, we are going to specifically focus upon the word *faith*. What faith are we called to contend for? A faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. This means our faith was originally taught by Jesus and then communicated to us through His apostles. Consider how the Apostle Paul highlights the transmission of this faith, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Based on this, we can draw out three important aspects about this faith.

1. Our faith is complete.

Our “once for all faith” is complete or finished, meaning there is no need to add or subtract from what has been revealed to us about our faith in God’s Word. A primary characteristic of false teaching is the idea that our faith is incomplete. Several years ago, I was getting ice cream with my family when I started to talk with a person about Christianity. After he told me where he went to church, he said that in all the years he has walked with Jesus Christ he has come to recognize that, while the Bible was very important, it is not enough. He went on to say that one needs to have more than just the Bible to grow spiritually. I asked him to clarify what he meant, and he went on to say that we also need God to directly speak to us. In response, I asked him if he considered himself to be a spiritually mature person, which he affirmed that he did. I then asked him if he considered himself to be more spiritually mature than the Apostle Paul. In the silence of his response, I then quoted the following words that the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). I then said that Paul clearly states we do not need further revelation about our faith as God has provided a sufficient source (Bible) for us to fully understand it; or in the words of Jude, we have a “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

2. Our faith is objective.

The Christian faith did not arise from mere human feelings, opinions, or experiences. Rather, it is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christianity is a historical faith where one can objectively examine the claims that Jesus made while He was here on earth. Paul echoes these words when he states that if the historical event of the resurrection of Jesus never happened,

then the Christian faith is a lie (1 Corinthians 15:14). We must keep in mind that there is a set of essential truths to the Christian faith that must never be lost or distorted.

3. Our faith is exclusive.

This means that there is only **one** faith and not many faiths. As Peter proclaims before the Jewish religious authorities, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). This statement by Peter reflects the overall presentation of the Christian faith in the book of Acts. Throughout this book, as the apostles encountered different belief systems (Jew, Greek, Roman, etc.), they always upheld the exclusivity of the faith that was once for all handed down to us. As we see in the conversion of the jailer in Philippi, the Christian faith teaches that salvation is **only** found in Jesus Christ, “And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household’” (Acts 16:29-31).

Who Are We to Contend Against?

In Jude’s command to contend for the faith, who are we supposed to contend against? Simply put, who are we called to literally wrestle against as we stand for the truth of our faith? Jude provides the answer to this question in verse 4, “For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation.” Thus, we are to contend for the faith against those *inside* the church who profess to be believers. The Greek word for crept literally means “enter in secretly by stealth.” Thus, the deception of false teaching lies in the fact that it originates from those who appear to be genuine believers but in reality, oppose the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, already entrenched inside the church, they can use this position to spread their false message quickly and effectively. As the Apostle Peter warned, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). The Apostle Paul also provides a similar warning to the Ephesian elders about how false teachers will rise up among them, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

This point of who we are called to contend against should cause us all to pause as we must keep in mind that we are dealing with people who are claiming to be “genuine” followers of Jesus Christ. Yet, with deceit, their true intentions are to lead others away from the truth of the faith that was once for all handed down to us. A recent example in my life reminded me of the importance of this

point by Jude. A person that my family knows very well informed us that he and his wife were getting a divorce. As the details of their divorce began to come out, we were shocked and heartbroken to find out that this man was living a double life. This person had deceived all of us into thinking that he was someone that he really was not. The words of the Apostle Paul echo the heart of Jude's warning to all of us, "for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Now that we have identified who we are to contend against, what do these people teach? The book of Jude actually has a parallel passage in the Bible. I encourage you to read 2 Peter chapter 2. What you will find is that Peter warns about these false teachers coming into the church, while Jude addresses the fact that they are already here. By analyzing both of these passages, we see that the heart of their teaching is a denial of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is, they promoted the idea that one could be saved but could continue to willfully live in sin. As Jude states in verse 4, "who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Through a distorted view of God's love and grace, these false teachers justified their sensual and immoral lifestyles. This reminds me of many pastors today who have no problem pointing out that God does forgive our sins, but never speak of the imperative that we all have as followers of Jesus to be holy. As Peter states, "but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15).

On a popular TV show, one of the contestants who identified as a Christian admitted to having sexual relations with another contestant. Upon being told that the Bible says we should keep the marriage bed pure (Hebrews 13:4), this person responded by saying, "Regardless of anything that I have done, I can do whatever, I sin daily, and Jesus still loves me." While all of us sin and are in need of God's grace and forgiveness, this should never create a carefree attitude toward sin where we appeal to God's grace and love to justify it. Instead, as the Apostle Paul stated, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2).

Dangers of False Teaching

When we read verses 5 through 13 in the book of Jude, we find out that the final outcome for these false teachers is judgment. To emphasize this point, Jude uses three examples from the Old Testament to show how God will judge these people.

The **first** example Jude cites is the nation of Israel who, because of unfaithfulness, had to wander in the wilderness (see Numbers 14:22-30, 35). **Second**, Jude points to the angels who left their proper domain and now remain chained in prison until the day of judgment (see Genesis 6:1-3; 2 Peter 2:4). **Third**, Jude reminds his readers how God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire for their sexual perversions (Genesis 18 and 19).

I encourage you to read the passages about these examples that Jude references, and as you reflect upon them, consider the following five important points. **First**, God will judge those who promote false teaching. Consider these powerful words by the Apostle Paul:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

The Greek word for *accursed* literally means “eternally condemned.” Thus, without any ambiguity, Paul is claiming that false teachers will face eternal judgment.

Second, God will judge those who follow false teaching. In the book of Revelation, Jesus rebukes the church at Thyatira for not only tolerating false teaching but participating in it. As a result, Jesus says that He will not only judge the false teacher but all those who follow in her teaching (Revelation 2:20-23). We need to heed this warning by Peter: “Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Peter 2:3).

To avoid following this path that leads to judgment, Jude identifies the core content of what false teachers advocate. False teachers “defile the flesh”

(Jude 1:8). This simply means they demonstrate no moral restraint as they justify their immoral lifestyles on the grounds of a distorted view of God's grace.

False teachers also reject the authority of God's Word. Specifically, Jude mentions how these false teachers blaspheme (speak evil of) angelic beings (Jude 1:8). This is the same point Peter addresses in his discourse on false teaching, "They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord" (2 Peter 2:10-11, NKJV).

To explain how these false teachers blaspheme the angelic realm, in verse 9, Jude discusses the encounter that Michael the archangel had with the devil (Satan) over the body of Moses. The details of this story do not come from the Old Testament. What we know about Moses' death is recorded in chapter 34 of Deuteronomy. Rather, this story comes from an extra-biblical source called *The Assumption of Moses*, which would have been familiar to Jude's readers. In this story, Satan makes two accusations as to why he should have authority over the body of Moses.

Besides the claim that Moses was a murderer (see Exodus 2 where Moses killed an Egyptian), Satan asserts that he was given dominion over this physical world. Responding to these accusations, Michael the archangel does not assert his authority over Satan, but rather rebukes him upon the authority of God Himself ("the Lord rebuke you"). In contrast to the example by Michael the archangel, these false teachers arrogantly placed themselves in a position of spiritual authority over the angelic realm. I recently saw a modern-day example of this as a prominent exorcist, along with his teenage daughter, engaged in conversations with what they claimed were demon-possessed people. As they attempted to cast out these demons, they spoke to these demons with an "arrogant" authority: "Get your hands off me, you filthy demon." "Do you want to get smitten by the sword of the Spirit?" The unbiblical approach of these self-proclaimed exorcists was only heightened as they charged a mere \$400 per exorcism, since they point out most demon-possessed people will need multiple exorcisms.

The **third** step of false teachers that leads towards judgment is their promotion of self-centered worship. Just as Cain disobeyed God's will regarding proper worship (Genesis 4), these false teachers worship God on their own terms, rather than on His terms.

Fourth, false teachers lead others into sin for personal gain. Like Balaam who received a financial reward for devising a plan to entice Israel into spiritual compromise (Numbers 31), Jude reminds his readers that greed is often the driving force behind false teachers.

The **final** step on this path of judgment is outright rebellion against God and His appointed leaders. As Korah led a rebellion against Moses and God (Numbers 16), false teachers produce in their followers a divisive and defiant spirit towards the God of the Bible.

Beginning with moral compromise, then on to theological error, and eventually to rejection and rebellion against God, Jude warns his readers to avoid the path of false teachers that will only lead them to spiritual death and

judgment. As Jude states:

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever (Jude 1:12-13).

Fruit of False Teaching

When we examine the fruit (behaviors and attitudes) that false teachers produce in the church, we find it is in direct contrast to the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Consider the following five ways Jude emphasizes this point (1:12-13).

First, he refers to false teachers as “hidden reefs at your love feasts.” These false teachers are hidden reefs in the sea that lie submerged and invisible beneath the surface of the water that can cause destruction and death to ships that pass by. Peter also emphasized this idea in his description of false teachers, “They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you” (2 Peter 2:13).

The concept of love feasts (agape feasts) is a reference to when the Christians in the early church would gather together and bring food to share with each other. These feasts often ended by having the Lord’s Supper together, becoming an opportunity to express genuine fellowship and unity among the believers. In contrast to what these feasts were intended for, these false teachers cared nothing for other believers but only for themselves. Just as Judas Iscariot ate the Last Supper with Jesus and the other disciples, these people ate with a heart of deception and betrayal for the things of God.

Second, Jude refers to these false teachers as “waterless clouds, swept along by winds.” I read an article about severe droughts that plagued the country of New Zealand. Because some areas of the country experienced no rain for weeks, the New Zealand army was sent to assist in drought relief. The towns hit the worst had severe water restrictions in place—water was only allowed to be used for cooking, drinking, and 40-second showers. Government officials pointed out that the landscape of some areas changed from lush green grass to a dry wasteland. Just as clouds without rain had no ability to help these people in New Zealand, so too these false teachers bring no spiritual value to the church. As John MacArthur notes, “These false teachers promise spiritual life but are empty clouds which bring the hope of rain, but actually deliver nothing but dryness and death.”

“Fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted” is the **third** way Jude refers to these false teachers. In John 15:5, Jesus specifically states that believers should bear fruit: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” In contrast, these false teachers do not bear fruit as they merely take

from others while not giving anything back. Their value to the body of Christ is like a barren fruit tree, and as Jesus goes on to say in John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (see also Matthew 7:15-20).

The **fourth** description Jude provides for these false teachers is they are “wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame.” In 2011, a devastating and powerful tsunami hit the country of Japan. According to scientists, the waves from this tsunami reached over 30 feet in height, traveled at the speed of 400 mph from where it started, and went six miles inland. The destruction from this tsunami resulted in approximately 20,000 deaths and more than 300 billion dollars in damages. So too, like the power of this tsunami, false teachers promote seemingly powerful ministries that are often accompanied with false signs and wonders. However, in the end, they prove to be destructive and deadly to the body of Christ.

The **final** description Jude provides about these false teachers is that they are “wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.” Recently, there have been meteorite sightings around the world. These meteorites streak across the sky with amazing brilliance but fade quickly into the darkness. In similar fashion, false teachers appear for a brief time but fade away, providing no long-term spiritual guidance.

As we can see from Jude’s descriptions, false teachers produce fruit that yields destruction, disappointment, and division. Led by ungodly passions rather than the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:18-19), false teachers are a greater danger to the church today than any atheist, liberal politician, or secular humanist outside the church. As a former high school soccer coach, the greatest enemy that hindered my team from accomplishing the goals we set every year was not the opposing teams we played; rather, it was our own players who were more concerned with themselves than the overall welfare of the team. Likewise, we need to be mindful that the greatest enemy we often face as Christians is within our own churches. While these people may remain undetected for a while, sooner than later, God will expose them and eventually deal with them (2 Peter 2:3).

How Do We Persevere Amid False Teaching in the Church?

We must stay alert and be vigilant. Through-out Scripture we have been warned about false teachers and apostates. Jude mentions that the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ had specifically foretold that “in the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions” (Jude 1:18). The overall purpose of these warnings was to help the believers be prepared so that they were not taken by surprise and deceived by those who preached a false gospel. Consider the words by the Apostle Paul to the elders at the church of Ephesus:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

How do we remain alert and vigilant against false teachers? Jude provides ways to do this on both a personal level (inward response) and then on a church level (outward response).

Our Inward Response

In regard to the *inward* response, Jude provides the following four steps (see verses 20-21).

First, build yourself up on the Word of God. When I was the coaching director for a soccer club in my area, I established a curriculum on player development. This curriculum consisted of activities that appropriately helped players progress from basic to more advanced soccer skills. This curriculum was essential for the players because those players who never advanced beyond the basics were always the ones exploited by the opposing teams. So too, as Christians we also have a curriculum (Bible) given to us by God, and when we study, reflect and apply what it teaches we can then grow spiritually. However,

just as some of the players I coached, there are many Christians who never progress beyond the basics of the faith, and, as a result, this has made them easy targets to be exploited by false teachers.

Second, pray in the Spirit. This means we look to the Holy Spirit for guidance and strength as we seek the will of God in every situation. In essence, praying in the Spirit is when we align our heart and desires with the heart and desires of God.

Third, remain in God's love. The Greek word for *remain*, which is also translated "keep," means "to watch or guard something that is precious to you." Thus, Jude is warning them not to allow anything to come between them and their precious love for God. As William MacDonald writes, "The love of God can be compared to sunshine. The sun is always shining. But when something comes between us and the sun, we are no longer in the sunshine." When we allow things such as unconfessed sin into our lives, it creates a barrier in our fellowship with God and impacts our ability to experience God's presence and blessings in our daily lives. This is why we need to live out the following words by Jesus, which will allow us to remain in God's love:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love (John 15:9-10).

Finally, anticipate the Lord's return. In Titus 2:13, Paul refers to Jesus' return as the blessed hope. Having hope can have a purifying effect on us as it gives us an eternal perspective so that we are not focused on the things of this world but upon the things of God. This is why we need to anticipate the return of Jesus. It is a reminder in our present situation of the glorious future that awaits us.

Our Outward Response

To stay alert and be vigilant, Jude also provides guidance on our *outward* response to others (see verses 22-23). This three-fold response reflects the different ways false teaching can impact people in the church. **First**, Jude says we need to "have mercy on those who doubt." Doubters are those who have been influenced by false teachers to the point that they are currently questioning the truth of the Gospel. Recently, a prominent worship leader revealed that he was "genuinely losing" his faith. He described his own faith crisis in the following, "I am struggling with many parts of the Christian belief system that seem so incoherent with common human morality." Our response to those with doubts is not to rebuke them but to demonstrate mercy and compassion, where we literally walk them through their questions and doubts with the desire to see their faith not only remain intact but come out even stronger.

Second, we need to show boldness to the deceived. The deceived are those that have been lured away from the truth by false teachers and are

following a path that will lead to eternal destruction. Our response to the deceived is a bold action of “snatching them out of the fire.” In the Greek, the word for “snatch” literally means “to seize by force.” It is like seeing a blind person walking towards a cliff where we physically stop them from going forward. Out of a genuine concern for the person’s spiritual welfare, this action is carried out with the goal to provide correction and restoration.

Third, “to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” We need to show caution (fear) to the depraved. The depraved are those who are so deeply infected by false teaching that, while we show them mercy, we must approach them with caution lest we also become deceived. Truly, one of the greatest dangers of the enemy is to make us think that we are too spiritual to fall. This causes us to take down our guard and makes us operate in our own strength and not that of the Holy Spirit. There is a prominent Christian leader who I have admired for many years as he preaches with passion and lives out his faith with a genuine authenticity. However, over the past few years, I have become concerned as this individual has started making alliances with those who do not preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. While his motives appear to be pure, as he claims this gives him the opportunity to preach the Gospel to them, sadly these people have started to impact him more than he has impacted them. As a result, I have watched him slowly fade away from the truth of the Gospel that he once boldly proclaimed.

Regardless of who we are dealing with, the key is to always extend *mercy*, which in the Greek literally means “to help one afflicted or seeking aid.” Thus, our ultimate goal in dealing with those caught in false teaching should first and foremost be a love for God and His Word, and then a genuine love and concern for the person who needs spiritual aid.

Keep in mind that when you contend for the faith against false teaching, you cannot always control how that person will ultimately respond. Indeed, I have lost some friends in the process, but, as the note I received below will show, I have also gained many brothers and sisters in Christ. As you read it, let us all rejoice in what God can do through us when we stand and contend for the faith:

I am so thankful for the additional information you sent me from your own notes. They have added a deeper clarity to all our Lord has opened my eyes to in these days...I cannot even seem to put into words (which is never difficult for me!) the ripple effect these revelations have had on my days. Nothing but goodness has been reaped! I am thankful. So very thankful for His mercy and discipline.

For all those books I read, retreats and women’s conferences I have attended, the groups/businesses I have supported by purchasing their products...I am now learning that there is compromise to the true gospel through their venues. Test the spirits. Amen. Stand firm in the faith. Amen.

As we await Jesus' return, deception will only grow more intense. This is why we must be prepared to contend for the faith as this task is not only essential to help others, but it is vital to ensure that we do not fall prey to spiritual deception. In the midst of false teaching and deception of his time, Jude concludes his letter with a powerful reminder on where our hope and confidence rest. May it provide all of us the encouragement to stand strong for the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 1:24-25).

Keys to Biblical Discernment

One of the goals of this booklet is to provide you with practical biblical principles that will enable you to discern truth from error and avoid being spiritually deceived. The following are some key points to remember.

First, our motivation in this process should be love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). We should never contend for the faith with an attitude of arrogance or with the mindset that our ultimate aim is to prove ourselves right. Instead, we should approach this essential task with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Yes, we do need to clearly distinguish truth from error, but let us do this with Christ-like love:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Second, we cannot judge the motives of a person's heart. So often, we try and act as judge and jury when it comes to evaluating the inner motives, attitudes and thoughts of others. However, while we can judge people's doctrine (teaching) and their lifestyles, the hearts of others can only be truly judged by God Himself. As Paul reminds the Corinthians:

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Third, let us strive to be known for what we believe rather than what we are against. Christians are often portrayed as being negative and critical of other people and their beliefs. We are often seen as formulating our beliefs as a reaction to what we don't believe rather than what we do believe. While in any quest for truth there will be the need to expose error, let us not forget that the proclamation of truth will always have a greater impact than the detection of an error.

Contending for the faith will bring us face to face with false teaching, and the most effective way we can deal with that is by exposing it to the truth of the Gospel message. As Jesus reminded the Jews who believed in Him:

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

Satan's Plan of Attack

What is Satan's plan of attack in deceiving humankind? We find the answer to this question back in the Garden of Eden:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:1-6).

In this passage, we find that Satan has a two-step strategy in deceiving mankind. Through the question, "Did God actually say...?," Satan set forth the first step, which was to undermine the words of God.

Undermining the Word of God

Throughout history, Satan's attack on the Word of God has come in a variety of ways. One way he has done this is by attacking the *inerrancy* of Scripture. In other words, Satan wants us to believe that the Bible is full of errors and is not trustworthy. The Jesus Seminar is an example of a group of scholars that have promoted this idea. With the task of re-examining the traditions surrounding the historicity of Jesus, and in particular His deeds and sayings, these scholars came to the conclusion that the majority of what Jesus said and did was not historically reliable. They argue that the Gospel material on Jesus is saturated with mythic elements and fanciful imagination on the part of the early church.

This attack has been fruitful as many seminaries today teach that the Bible is a human invention composed of myths. As a result, a whole generation of pastors, missionaries, and Christian schoolteachers has been taught to deny key

aspects of the Christian faith such as the virgin birth and the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Besides attacking the reliability and divine origin of the Bible, Satan attacks the *priority* of Scripture. Satan has effectively accomplished this with entertainment. Through movies, television, sporting events and so on, Satan finds ways to get us to focus our time and energy on personal pleasure, rather than upon personal spiritual growth, which comes through prayer and the study of God's Word.

The sad reality is that many churches have now adapted this strategy in order to promote growth. Some proponents of the church growth movement assert that the common ground we have with nonbelievers is not the Bible, but our common needs, hurts, and interests as humans. Therefore, we must find another starting point besides the Bible to draw them into our churches. Thus, through the use of various marketing techniques, church growth experts seek out ways to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ palatable to the non-believing world. As a result, pastors who previously relied upon the preaching of the Word of God as their main source of instruction, now rely upon personal stories, jokes, skits, pop psychology, and various media outlets to instruct their congregation. Yes, the seed of Satan's attack on the priority of God's Word has resulted in the creation of spiritual institutions of entertainment, where the preaching of God's Word has been replaced with feel good theology:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Satan has also attacked the *clarity* of Scripture as he tries to get us to believe that we really cannot know with certainty what the Bible teaches. Some of the key proponents of the emergent movement endorse this idea about the Bible. According to them, an understanding of the Bible has to occur through an ongoing conversation. They state that we should have a "generous orthodoxy" where we welcome differing views and perspectives. Doubt is something that should be embraced as a virtue as no one can claim to fully know the truth. A key spokesperson for this movement claims that we should always question what we think we know about the Bible, as he asserts that the Bible is a slowly evolving human understanding of God. Despite his elevation of doubt and the need to question, this man has recently asserted with "certainty" that a literal hell does not exist and that Jesus is not the only way to the Father.

While conversation and asking questions are beneficial for one's spiritual experience, we need to get beyond mere talk to a set of convictions on what we believe, and why we believe it—"a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Let us not follow the same path of those who are "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

A final way Satan attempts to undermine God's Word is by attacking the

insufficiency of Scripture. Through extra-biblical revelations and personal experiences, Satan deceives people into believing that the Bible is not adequate in their spiritual journey. This type of attack is what we find in cults today, where they claim to possess some form of divine revelation which is equal to or greater than the Bible.

This idea is also prominent in many circles where it is taught that personal encounters with God are on the same authoritative level as Scripture. One key person of this persuasion made the claim that as we follow God we have to learn to go beyond what we know (Bible). Through this type of theology, the church has been saturated with false signs and spiritual experiences.

While it is true that the Spirit is alive and active in our lives, we must remember that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Replacing the Word of God

After attacking the Word of God, Satan moves to his next step in deceiving mankind which is to *replace the Bible* as the final source of authority. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve initially trusted in God and looked to Him alone as their final authority source in knowing right from wrong. However, after Satan attacked and undermined the words of God, he was able to deceive Adam and Eve into believing they no longer needed God. Instead, they could trust in themselves. With the promise that they would be like God, Satan successfully replaced God as the final source of authority in Adam and Eve’s life.

Since the beginning, Satan has been actively trying to create an authority crisis for us. He knows that without the solid foundation of Scripture, we will be left vulnerable to his deceptive and crafty ways. Our adversary knows that without the Bible we no longer have an absolute standard by which to determine and discern truth from error. Without God’s Word, Satan knows we are defenseless in this spiritual battle as we have relinquished one of our greatest weapons, “the Sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17; see also Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, if we want to avoid being led astray and ignorant of Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2:11), we must look to Scripture as our final source of authority.

Establish Safeguards

One of the most inspiring athletes that I have ever read about was Charlotte Brown. As a high school senior, she won a bronze medal for the pole vault in Texas. While winning a medal at the State Tournament is a great accomplishment, this is not what caught my attention as I read her story. What caught my attention is that Charlotte ran down the 130 foot plus runway, carrying a pole around 10 feet in length, vaulting over 11 feet in the air, while being blind.

While Charlotte's story is certainly inspiring and is an excellent reminder about displaying perseverance and determination in the face of challenges and obstacles, her story also carries with it another important lesson. In this amazing feat, she had to count her steps and incorporate a beeper to tell her when to plant the pole. Without having these safeguards in place, she would not have known where she was on the runway which, in turn, would have prevented her from successfully making her vault. So too, in our spiritual walk, we need to create safeguards to help provide us with guidance and wisdom. In light of this, the following are three biblical principles that act as safeguards to help discern truth from error.

No Compromise

A friend recently notified me that he would be attending the conference of a prominent Christian pastor. Even though he acknowledges that this pastor taught things that were not in line with God's Word, he still was going to attend because "some of what he says is true." Another person I know attended a church where it was public knowledge that the pastor had been involved in a number of extramarital relationships. Despite this reality, my friend continued to attend the church, telling me "everyone makes mistakes."

So often, we find ourselves, just like my two friends, easily justifying our decision to compromise what we know to be true. Certainly, there are aspects of the Christian faith that are left up to each individual conscience (see Romans 14), but when it comes to issues of doctrine that are clearly laid out in Scripture, compromise at any level is categorically rejected. For example, in a culture that valued hospitality, the Apostle John warns his readers not to invite anyone into their home who brought another teaching:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works (2 John 10-11).

The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian believers not to be partakers with those who were promoting the idea that Christians had the freedom to live as they wanted to:

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them (Ephesians 5:6-7).

The idea of not compromising biblical truth should be self-evident for Christians, especially in light of the fact that we are called to contend for the faith (Jude 1:3). However, the call for “unity” and the goal to “reclaim our culture” has taken precedence over scriptural truth by many in the church. Some Christians have compromised their commitment to Christ and His Word through their cooperation with the global call to eradicate the dangers facing humankind, such as poverty and starvation. While there is definitely a need for the church to stand for social and moral causes, many churches no longer make the proclamation of the Gospel their primary importance. As a result, many churches only meet the physical needs of people, while ignoring the greatest need, which is the condition of a person’s heart. Just as it was with the Apostle Paul, we must remember that our primary calling is to bring the Gospel message to the lost “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me [Christ]” (Acts 26:18).

In our call to contend for the faith and to be equipped to discern truth from error, we must recognize that we cannot deny or compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must be like the believers in Ephesus who were commended by Jesus Christ because they would not “bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false” (Revelation 2:2). The dangers of participating with those who preach another Gospel have eternal consequences and were one of the reasons Jesus had to rebuke the church at Pergamum. Listen to Jesus’ words of rebuke and may we “hear what the Spirit says to the churches”:

But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth (Revelation 2:14-16; see also Jesus’ rebuke to the church at Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29).

Test All Things

The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonians to “test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Specifically, they were to carry out a careful examination (test/prove) of what they heard. *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* makes the following comment about this verse:

The meaning here is, that they were carefully to examine everything proposed for their belief. They were not to receive it on trust; to take it on assertion; to believe it because it was urged with vehemence, zeal, or plausibility. In the various opinions and doctrines which were submitted to them for adoption, they were to apply the appropriate tests from reason and the word of God, and what they found to be true they were to embrace; what was false they were to reject.

The Apostle John reiterates this injunction to test all things, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Just as one would use a test to determine the purity and value of a metal, similarly, we are to test the purity and biblical accuracy of all teachings and teachers.

While God spoke in the past through the prophets, today He has given us a greater and more authoritative prophetic voice. That voice is His Son, Jesus Christ. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

As we test/prove all things, keep in mind the following five essential questions to help us discern whether a particular teaching or teacher is in line with the Word of God.

1. Who or what is their final source of authority? As it relates to false teaching and teachers, you will often find those who place themselves above God’s Word. They sometimes function as tyrannical leaders who manipulate, take advantage of, and control others, as was the case in Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:20). Some will claim to have special revelation from God that only they are privileged to receive, therefore, everyone should listen to them as God’s true messenger. False teachers often infer that, as God’s anointed, they are above correction or rebuke. One prominent television evangelist made the audacious claim that he has received a special “anointing” from God, which entitles him to demand from God such things as the power to heal and perform miracles.

A true teacher from God will always appeal to God’s Word as the final source of authority. People who are really anointed by the Lord do not walk around with a sense of entitlement. They do not seek to lord it over others or demand God to act in accordance with their will. Instead, they will always exalt Christ and His Word. Never submit to those who arrogantly elevate themselves or twist and distort the words of God. “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

A true messenger of God will not be offended when you test them to confirm that what they teach is in accord with Scripture. This is why the Apostle Paul praised the Jews in Berea because “they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). May we always be like the noble Bereans and test everything according to our final source of authority, the Word of God.

God’s Word must be our foundation. David said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). Paul tells us that “All Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Timothy 3:16). Hebrews 4:12 states, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

2. What predictions are being made? Another area we should be testing is the predictions made by supposed prophets giving what they often claim to be “new revelations.” In the book of Deuteronomy, God has provided a way to identify false prophets. Specifically, if what a person predicts does not come to pass then we know that person has not spoken on behalf of God:

And if you say in your heart, “How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

This test is vital, especially as we see the rise of end-time predictions and self-proclaimed prophets. Concerning end-time events, many people claim special knowledge and insight regarding when Jesus Christ will return. One example was an American Christian radio broadcaster and evangelist. Based on his calculations, he predicted that Jesus would return on May 21, 2011, which would then usher in five months of global catastrophe, culminating with the final destruction of the world on October 21, 2011. Despite a previous false prediction for the end of the world (September 6, 1994), many people sold all they had and traveled across America proclaiming his end-time scenario.

With all of the problems facing us today (terrorism, nuclear war, economic hardships, diseases, natural disasters, and so much more), we will continue to face a barrage of prophets who forecast their unbiblical end-time scenarios. While I do believe that we are seeing the signs which Jesus said would occur prior to His return (Matthew 24), we must be careful not to follow teachings that go beyond what the Bible has revealed (Matthew 24:36).

Along with countless predictions, there is a growing trend of end-time prophets and apostles who claim to hear directly from God and speak on His behalf as did such Old Testament prophets as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. Despite the test we are given in Deuteronomy 18, leaders of these prophetic movements erroneously claim that mistakes by prophets should be expected. As a matter of fact, they assert that if we do not give God’s “prophets” today the freedom to

make mistakes, then we inhibit their ability to mature in their prophetic gift. The danger of this statement is that many people have been spiritually deceived by the mistakes made by so-called immature prophets. Unfortunately, just like it was during the days of Jeremiah, many in the church today take pleasure in listening to the flattering words of false prophets:

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes? (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

In a time when so many profess to be receiving revelations from God through dreams, visions, and revelations, we must test every claim by the Word of God.

3. What are their beliefs and teachings? The Israelites were instructed to use the following *doctrinal* test to avoid being led astray by false prophets:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, “Let us go after other gods,” which you have not known, “and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16). While we should test *all* doctrine, one specific area of importance is Christology [the branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ]. If you study the Apostle Paul’s teachings, you will find that Jesus was the central focus:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

As was the case with Paul, the preeminence of Christ will always be a defining mark of true biblical teaching. In contrast, false teachers will often diminish Him and offer an incorrect understanding of His nature. This was the case with the false teachers John warned about in his first epistle. It was in the context of these teachers’ denial of the incarnation that he called his readers to test the spirits to see whether they are from God:

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:2-3).

An unbiblical view of Jesus is a common trait among false teachers. For instance, one group says that Jesus was not divine but merely a created being who, before He lived on the earth, was Michael the archangel. Another group teaches that Jesus was a man who became a god, and, one day, we too can become gods. Unfortunately, non-biblical views of Jesus are not only relegated to aberrant groups. Even in the church, there are those who adhere to the idea that believers share in Christ's divine nature ("little gods theory"). Others teach that Jesus' death on the cross was not to provide atonement but merely an example of self-sacrifice. There is also a steady move in the church today away from Jesus as the only way of salvation (Acts 4:12). As a result, many churches have become breeding grounds for human-centered theology; denying Christ's deity and exalted position as King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:9-11).

As we remain diligent to test all doctrine, let us heed the words the Apostle Paul gave to the Galatians:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9).

4. What is their lifestyle like? Another area we should test is the lifestyles of all leaders. We live in a day when people flock to churches for the specific purpose of sitting under the teaching of a dynamic speaker. I remember a conversation with a person who told me the sole reason she attended a certain church was because the pastor was a powerful communicator. While there is nothing wrong with a teacher having charisma and being effective in relating to his audience, this quality should not be our final determiner in why we attend a church or follow a particular ministry. We need to get beyond the outward appearance and evaluate/test the way that a teacher lives and make sure that their life lines up with God's Word. We should seek out teachers who strive for holiness in all areas of their lives (1 Peter 1:13-16). We should look for leaders whose goal is to reflect Jesus Christ in all they do because "whoever says he abides in him [Jesus] ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6).

As you carry out this lifestyle test, you will often discover that false teachers are motivated by greed. I heard a prominent preacher claim that God would respond to the prayers of his listeners if they first "sowed a seed" (gave a monetary contribution) to his ministry. What a contrast to the Apostle Paul who reminded the Ephesian elders that he had never coveted their personal belongings:

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:32-35).

Along with greed, sexual immorality is frequently found among false teachers who often prey upon the emotions of others to fulfill their personal lusts and passions. While it is true that only God can fully know the heart and intentions of a person, we must not neglect to consider the testimony of a person's life. This is vital in helping us avoid being deceived by the flattering words of a false teacher. As Peter warned his readers:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep (2 Peter 2:1-3).

5. Are the supernatural manifestations biblical? Another area to test concerns supernatural manifestations. This is important because we are seeing a proliferation of those claiming to perform miraculous signs and wonders that have no resemblance whatsoever to the miracles in Scripture. Unbiblical practices and phenomena are erroneously promoted as ways to bring us into the presence of God and access His glory. As a result, some have allowed experience to supersede biblical truth.

As a youth, I was blessed to experience the active role of the Holy Spirit in my life. Through this upbringing, I was also exposed to various manifestations that were falsely attributed to the Holy Spirit. Fortunately, I had a father who taught me to test all things by the Word of God. As I did, I came to recognize that not all signs and wonders were from God. Some were human fabrications while others were demonic in origin, such as some of the phenomena I had witnessed in Haiti (voodoo) and India (Hinduism).

Jesus warned that false christs and false prophets would arise and deceive people: "For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). And Paul warned about counterfeit supernatural phenomena: "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Jesus taught His disciples that not everyone who performs miracles and

prophecies in His name is truly from Him:

On that day, many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Miracles, signs, and wonders by themselves are not the verification that one’s power is from God. As previously mentioned, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” and his servants “disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). They attempt to deceive believers in Christ by supposedly supernatural manifestations.

While God does intervene today in miraculous ways (healing, protection, and so forth), we must exercise discernment in harmony with biblical truth to differentiate truth from error, light from darkness, genuine miracles from imitation and counterfeit, and the voice of God from that of ourselves, others, or the enemy.

Our greatest desire should not be to seek after signs and wonders, which was one of the reasons Jesus rebuked the crowds who followed Him: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (John 4:48). Instead, our greatest desire should be to *know* Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Pursue Spiritual Maturity

I coached high school soccer for 20 years. One of the things I emphasized to my players was that if they wanted to be a successful and competitive player, they must first master the basics. In other words, they must learn to effectively pass, dribble, shoot, etc. Players that fail to do this always end up struggling in their development as they are never able to move on to more advanced skills. As a result, many of them never get beyond the basics, falling short in reaching their potential.

This, too, is the case in our spiritual lives as we will not grow if we do not go beyond the basics of our faith. This was the problem with the Corinthians and is why the Apostle Paul could only feed them with milk and not solid food:

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Let us heed this warning and get beyond the milk of our faith. In fact, if we want to be effective in contending for the faith, we must pursue spiritual maturity. It is only by doing this that we can be better equipped to discern truth

from error:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).

So then, what are some things that we can do to grow spiritually? As it relates to the specific issue of having discernment and contending for the faith, the following are a few things that each of us should do.

First, we must meditate upon God's Word (Joshua 1:8). In other words, we must study, reflect and apply God's Word on a daily basis. As we do this, we need to employ an effective method of Bible study. Tools, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, etc., can be great ways to help us better understand the passages that we are studying.

Second, we need to have an intentional prayer life (Colossians 4:2). Rather than just praying quick prayers with a laundry list of needs, we need to be men and women who separate time each day to seek the Lord.

Third, we need to develop a good theological library. Beyond commentaries and Bible dictionaries, we should also acquire good books on theology. Like putting the pieces of a puzzle together, these sources help supplement our study of God's Word by giving us a clearer picture on topics, such as who God is.

Finally, we need to seek out solid teachers. Along with having a pastor who can expound upon God's Word, everyone should create a database of teachers and/or ministries that you can go to on a variety of doctrinal issues. These ministries, which specialize in researching specific topics from a biblical perspective, are great ways to find information in an effective and efficient manner. As new teachings and ideas continue to come to the forefront, it is extremely helpful to have these teachers and ministries at your disposal.

These steps, along with others, are great ways to grow in our faith. It is through this growth that we can avoid being led away by error, as we stand firm upon the Word of God:

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But

grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Peter 3:14-18).

As we near the conclusion of our study on biblical discernment, my prayer is for God to empower everyone reading this with the wisdom and knowledge to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Until the day the Lord returns, we must never grow weary in this task. The implications of this battle for truth are eternal, so “keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16). “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith...guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you” (1 Timothy 6:11-12, 20-21).

Proper Perspective

In closing, let us reflect on the inspired words of the Apostle Paul to put our lives and ministries, and that of all others who influence us, in proper perspective:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of

Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved (Philippians 3:7 – 4:1).

For More Information

BJ and Bill Rudge have produced numerous books, pamphlets and audio messages on a variety of timely topics. For a complete listing or a copy of the ministry's informative newsletter, visit www.billrudge.org or write to:

Bill Rudge Ministries

P.O. Box 108
Sharon, PA 16146
U.S.A.

www.billrudge.org